

Second session of the Forum on Minority Issues

Statement by Idriss Jazaïry

Ambassador and Permanent Representative

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Madame President,

On behalf of the Algerian delegation, allow me to echo those who already congratulated you on your nomination. We commend the work and contribution of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

Like other Mediterranean countries, Algeria has been a land of welcome and cohabitation for Berber, Arab, African and Mediterranean cultures, has experienced significant intermingling of civilizations and communities throughout history, and as such cannot lay claim a pure and homogenous ethnicity. The substratum of the Algerian population is Amazigh, and Algerian society should be assessed in light of how it has been politically, economically and culturally established throughout the ages.

Given its geographical position at the crossroad of ancestral cultures and civilisations, Algeria has taken advantage of the richness, creativity and genius of these inputs and made an innovative synthesis out of it.

In the 7th century Islam was introduced to North Africa by Okba Ibn Nafaa, who came from the Middle East with less than 30,000 men. These men did not remain in the North African region however, which at the time consisted of 25 million inhabitants, but returned to Egypt. A few centuries later the second wave of Hilalians didn't settle there either, but also returned to the Middle East. In this respect, it wasn't the population's indignity that was affected by these waves of Islamisation, but rather their Arab or Amazigh languages, depending whether populations settled within major circulation routes or in hard to access areas.

Algeria is a unitary state. The Movement for the Autonomy of Kabyle, referred to in the declaration of the Worldwide Amazigh Conference, has not been refused authorization. In order to be authorized however, every political group must conform to both the Constitution, in particular article 42 which includes the concept of national unity, and to the 1989 law on political parties, which was subsequently amended in 1997. Article 3 of this law stipulates

that a political party must conform to the following principles and objectives in all its areas of activity:

- Not using the three fundamental components of national identity, namely Islam, Arab-ness and Amazigh-ness, for the purpose of any partisan propaganda.

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- Consolidating national unity
- Preserving security and national territorial integrity and the country's independence.

The triad of Islam, Arab-ness and Amazigh-ness emphasized in the basic law illustrates the rich composition of society and the diversity in its unity. This diversity inherently rejects exclusion, intolerance and discrimination. Amazigh speaking communities have settled across different parts of the country and do not constitute a national minority. The population census is not based on religious nor linguistic criteria. This approach rejects the reductionist view on Algerian personality which, since the 7th century, has been and remains based on this triad.

In this respect, in the preamble of the Algerian Constitution, the Amazigh element has been highlighted in the same way the Arab and Muslim elements have been. With this progressive reaffirmation of identity, and as a result of the amendment of the Constitution on 10th April 2002, the Amazigh language has been made a national language. It is taught in Algerian schools at all levels of education, whenever there is need and the conditions in which to teach it are suitable, especially in terms of pedagogical supervision.

The Algerian state has implemented an active and deliberate policy to support measures that aim at encouraging the promotion of the Amazigh language. This was strengthened by the creation of the High Commission for Amazigh-ness, attached to the President of the Republic, by the creation of two Amazigh language institutes at the Tizi-Ouzou and Béjaia Universities, and by the launch of daily TV news and an Amazigh language television channel.

Adopted by the National People's Assembly on the 16th January 1996, the law on the generalisation of the national Amazigh language aims to return the language to its rightful place in society and to promote its use.